

Land Use and Structures

The Essex CBD is an area of small shops, restaurants, professional offices and service establishments. Most occupy storefront space, but a good number are in converted residences. Structures are typically one or two stories. Larger establishments tend to be government offices or public facilities. There are some residential uses, including upper story apartments and one or two older detached dwellings. Uses in the extended area to the west are more directly oriented to the automobile -- with gas stations, repair shops, and drive-in convenience stores -- than in the CBD, where direct driveway access is limited. Stores in the extended area also includes many converted residences. The single institutional development in the extended area is a nursing home south of Eastern Avenue at Back River.

Land Use Pattern

Map C portrays land use in the Essex core on a building-by-building basis. Most of the commercial (retail) space tends to be on the south side of Eastern Avenue and is especially concentrated in the 500 block. Office space, on the other hand, tends to the north side of the street and to the west, in the 400 block. Many structures house both retail and office tenants. Large public facilities are located on the south side in the 400 block: the Baltimore County multi-service government center and U.S. Post Office, and the county occupational training center. Other public facilities are the cerebral palsy center at Taylor and Maryland, and the historical museum in the 500 block of Eastern Avenue.

Downtown Essex has a number of parking lots, as shown on Map C. There are two County Revenue Department lots and three larger private lots on Eastern Avenue. Two additional private lots that are free and available to the public face each other across Maryland Avenue at Taylor Avenue.



Floor Space Trends

Table 1 presents floor space in the Essex CBD by broad categories of space use for the years 1976, 1980 and 1989. The total inventory appears to have increased by about 3,500 square feet over this period, but this difference is most probably due simply to measurement error or scope of the survey. Uses of some structures may also have changed from or to uses not included in the different surveys (e.g., residential). The 1980 data are based on information on previous tenants of existing space, thus the total inventory is the same in both cases.

In general terms, retail uses have maintained a consistent base of about 120,000 to 130,000 square feet since 1976, although that base suffered from earlier losses, notably the closing of the only supermarket in the CBD (an A&P) prior to 1976. Consumer services have increased by almost 50 percent -- from 14,000 square feet in 1976 to 20,000 square feet today. Other uses have increased by almost 100 percent: from 74,000 square feet of office and other uses in 1976, to 156,000 square feet at present. Vacant space, on the other hand, has declined to one-third its 1976 level. Overall, occupied space increased by 42,000 square feet in the late-1970's, and by another 40,000 square feet in the 1980's.

These changes have meant shifts in the relative mix of business and other uses in the Essex CBD. In particular, the retail function has given way considerably to office, service and government functions, although it has almost maintained its gross square footage, as these figures illustrate (based on occupied space):

	<u>Percent of Occupied Space</u>		
	<u>1976</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1989</u>
Retail Trade	57.7%	52.3%	40.2%
Consumer Services	6.7	6.2	6.8
Other Uses	<u>35.6</u>	<u>41.5</u>	<u>53.0</u>
Total Occupied	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Shoppers goods stores include The Family Dollar Store and numerous specialty shops: antiques and used furniture, discount apparel, gun shop, thrift shop, etc. The CBD has lost most of its better furniture and clothing stores. Convenience goods, on the other hand, are on the rise, due almost entirely to an increase in the number of restaurants in the CBD. Personal services have expanded somewhat. The primary service being barber and beauty establishments.

Table 1. NON-RESIDENTIAL FLOOR SPACE INVENTORY BY TYPE
OF SPACE 1/, ESSEX CBD, 1976 TO 1989

	<u>1976</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1989</u>
<u>Retail Trade</u>			
Shoppers Goods	66,045	74,075	37,550
Convenience Goods	42,120	43,850	53,450
Other Retail	<u>12,300</u>	<u>14,625</u>	<u>27,150</u>
(Subtotal)	(120,465)	(132,550)	(118,150)
<u>Consumer Services</u>			
Personal Services	13,925	12,840	16,950
Business Services	<u>N/A</u>	<u>3,000</u>	<u>3,000</u>
(Subtotal)	(13,925)	(15,840)	(19,950)
<u>Other Uses</u>			
Offices	49,035	57,050	83,965
Government	2/	2/	54,000
Other, Unknown	<u>25,278</u>	<u>48,250</u>	<u>18,100</u>
(Subtotal)	(74,313)	(105,300)	(156,065)
All Occupied	208,703	253,690	294,165
Vacant	<u>130,325</u>	<u>88,875</u>	<u>48,400</u>
Total	339,028	342,565 3/	342,565

1/ Excludes auto dealers and repair.

2/ Included in other uses.

3/ Inventory is limited to space still existing
in 1989, as of December 30.

Source: RPR Economic Consultants Field Survey.

Zoning Districts in the CBD

The Essex business district within the study area is entirely zoned business, with commercial overlay districts. Map D shows the areal extent of the three business zones and two overlay districts that cover the CBD; the uses allowed in the respective business districts are:

- o BL (Business, Local): Uses permitted include most types of convenience goods, shoppers goods and specialty retail establishments, plus personal services, banks and offices, and other stores, services and business establishments as one would expect in a commercial center. Included also are accessory uses or structures, such as garages and parking spaces, and signs. Special exceptions would allow pet boarding, service stations and repair garages, boat yards and marinas, car wash, community social/cultural/educational or recreational facilities and day care, drive-in restaurants, dry cleaning plants, motels and hotels, theatres, laboratories, apartments, and miscellaneous recreational facilities. In the event of a permitted fabricating or repair facility, the maximum number of employees engaging in such activities can be no more than five.
- o BM (Business, Major): All uses permitted in a BL zone, plus a wide variety of such uses as recreational and entertainment facilities (many of which are permitted in BL zones only by special exception), repair facilities, smaller printing and dry cleaning plants, hotels and theatres, and warehouses. Employees in fabrication or processing, repair or dry cleaning cannot number over 25. Service stations, car wash establishments, drive-in restaurants, bus terminals laboratories, and some additional recreational facilities may be permitted by special exception.
- o BR (Business, Roadside): All uses permitted in the BM zone (and hence also in the BL zone), plus such uses as larger printing firms, bottling plants, motel an motor court, pet boarding, greenhouse, and volunteer fire department. Uses such as building materials/farm supply and equipment/lumber/stone works, etc., tire retreading, kennel, and public utility storage yard are permitted when set 50 feet or more from residential

zones at the zone ends. By special exception, service stations, a wide range of transportation facilities, moving and storage, larger recreational, motor vehicle sales, and other uses can be permitted.

Specific regulations for these zones for setbacks, front, side and rear yards, special conditions, and building height will not be detailed here. Areas such as the Essex CBD that have predominantly older structures predating many of the ordinance specifications will evidence many non-conformances and variances. Without overlay districts, the floor area ratios for the zones are 3.0 for BL, 4.0 for BM, and 2.0 for BR. Off-street parking requirements for selected uses for the three business zones are as follows (generally in terms of building floor space):

- o Nightclubs and restaurants: one per 50 square feet;
- o Medical offices: one per 300 square feet;
- o Other offices, institutions and non-retail commercial establishments of more than 5,000 square feet: one per 300 square feet of ground floor space, and one per 500 square feet of upper floor space;
- o Retail establishments: one per 200 square feet; and
- o Industrial and wholesale: one per three employees.

Provision for such off-street parking normally would be required at the time of application for a building permit to construct or enlarge a structure for which offstreet parking is required. The parking spaces provided would have to be either on the same lot or within 500 feet of the building they are intended to serve. Additional requirements govern provision of loading spaces for retail stores, industrial and warehouse facilities and similar facilities of 10,000 square feet or more, at the rate of one space for each 50,000 square feet in excess of 10,000 square feet.

As Map D indicates, the BL zone predominates in the CBD, covering properties to the south of Eastern Avenue and east of Margaret Avenue, to the north of Eastern Avenue and west of the Margaret Avenue terminus (at 514 Eastern Avenue), and to the south of Eastern Avenue west of (and including) 435 Eastern Avenue. A BR zone includes all properties on the south side of Eastern Avenue from 437 Eastern Avenue to Margaret Avenue; this includes the government multi-purpose center and post office, the major retail structure in the 500 block, and parking lots and other structures to the rear across Maryland Avenue. The properties fronting on and north of Eastern Avenue from the terminus of Margaret Avenue eastward to the study area boundary at Woodward Avenue include all three business zones in succession: BR (514 to 522 Eastern Avenue), BM (526 to 530 Eastern Avenue), and BL (532 Eastern Avenue). It may be noted that these three groups of properties were all zoned BL in 1980, which covered all of the downtown at that time except for the above-described BR zone south of Eastern Avenue.

Properties in the CBD are covered by two overlay zoning districts which further qualify the uses permitted and the regulations that govern them. These are the CCC (Commercial, Community Core) and CSA (Commercial, Supporting Area) districts. Particulars of the CCC district are:

- o Apartments are a permitted use, but only above the first story of a building. Side windows of apartments must be 25 feet from the property line, with 50 feet between apartment side windows facing each other in adjacent buildings.
- o No limit is placed directly on the number of apartment units, but the maximum floor ratio for the site is placed at 4.0, and a minimum amenity open space ratio is set at 0.2. Minimum parking for apartments is 1.25 spaces per dwelling unit, but up to 50 percent of the apartment spaces can be applied to required parking for commercial and office parking at the site.

In 1980 the entire downtown Essex study area fell under the CCC overlay district. The rezoned northeastern portion of the study area, which now includes BR and BM as well as BL zones, now is covered by the CSA overlay district in place of CCC, which remains in place in the rest of the study area. The CSA overlay district allows automobile service stations as a use by-right, rather than by special exception. The purpose is to provide a transition for highway commercial to CCC (Commercial Community Core).

Land Use and Zoning in the Extended Area

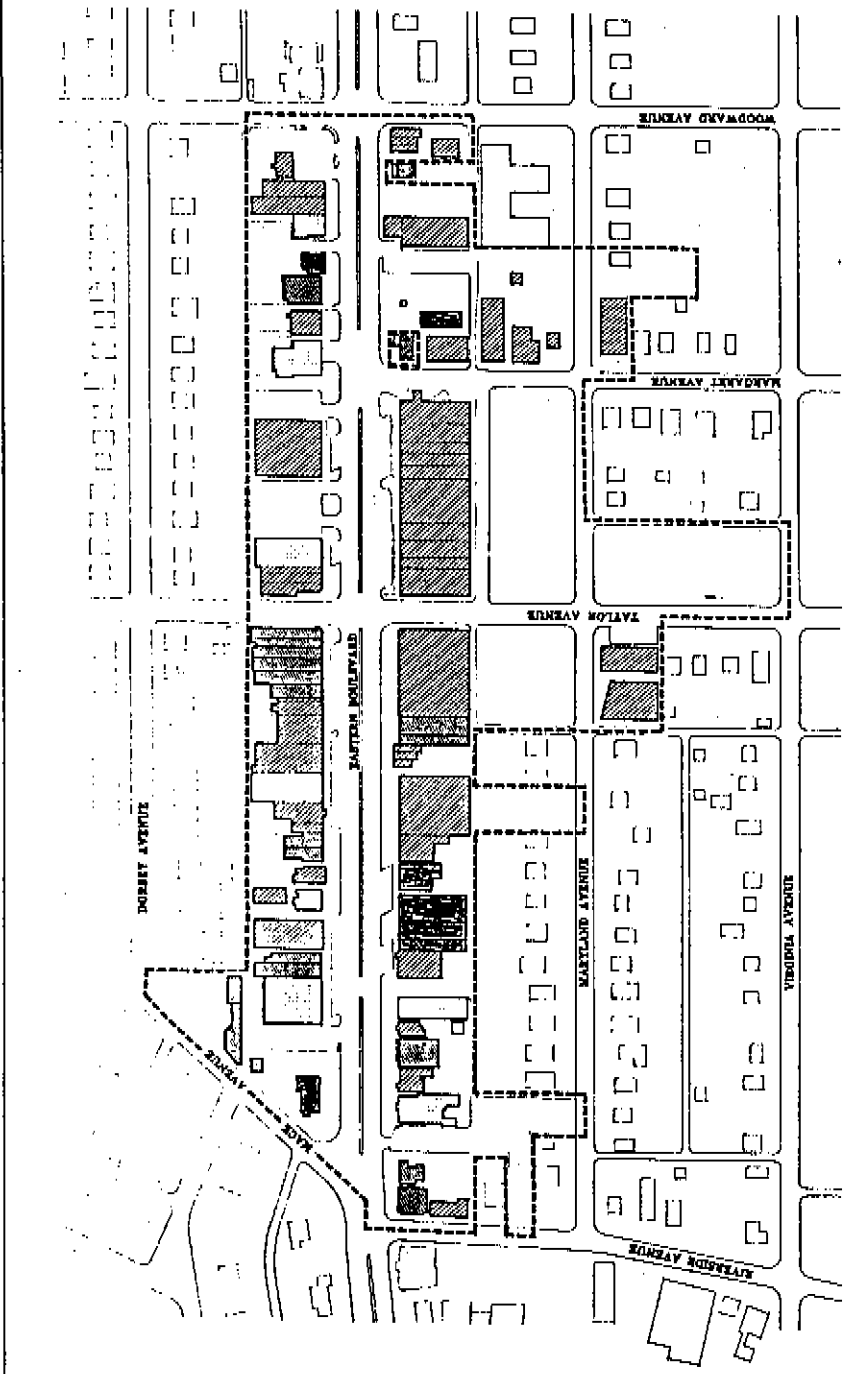
The extended study area runs from Mace Avenue to the Back River Bridge and includes the 000 to 300 blocks of Eastern Avenue west of the CBD. This is a transitional area; the zoning is for business roadside, allowing for residential uses if they are contiguous to residential. There are many converted residences in this area, primarily housing offices and marginal shops on first floors and in basements. Office uses include several legal firms, insurance, real estate and construction, with retail such as gift shop and deli. Parking at these properties is often to the sides of the structures in widened driveways.

The overall mix of uses in the extended area gives evidence to the dominance of the automobile: there are several auto sales and auto repair establishments, an auto parts store, Jiffy Lube, gas stations, tire store, and highway-access retail (liquor store, 7-11). Miscellaneous uses include a bingo parlor, a nursing home, and a park and ride lot. There are several restaurants -- Ho Jo Chinese, Terrace Inn, Crabhouse -- some of which are rather unsightly and apparently not too active. The only real cluster of stores is at the Mazer Brothers facility (auto parts, plus furniture, printing, etc.). A largely vacant retail/office structure is located at Eastern Avenue and Riverside Avenue, just outside the CBD.

Building Condition

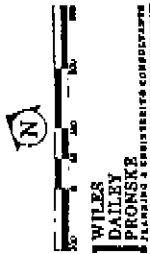
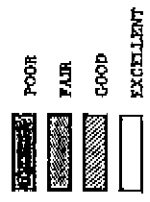
Visual inspection of structures in the Essex CBD was undertaken to determine the general physical condition of the buildings in the area. Structures were rated as being in excellent, good, fair or poor condition, based on obvious signs of deterioration or need for maintenance and repair. The ratings relate to structural conditions; they will reflect the impacts of facade renovation, but they will not reflect other aspects of street beautification or structure or lot functional or economic obsolescence. The results of the survey are shown on Map E. Among the findings are that:

- o Over 80 percent of the 334,000 square feet of commercial retail and office space is rated to be in good or excellent condition; 12 percent is considered to be in fair condition, and only seven percent is rated poor. This is a substantial improvement over condition ratings for previous years and suggests considerable progress in reversing deterioration and in upgrading the area.
- o Most of the floor space in poor condition -- over 80 percent of the total -- is found on the south side of the 400 block of Eastern Avenue. Affected properties include 423-427 Eastern Avenue. Other properties considered in poor condition are 400 Eastern Avenue (Guttenberger's Grocery, the oldest structure in the Essex CBD) and 522 Eastern Avenue.
- o The south side of the 400 Eastern Avenue block also contains 45 percent of the space in only fair condition, so that almost 30 percent of the space in that block is rated in less than good condition. The north side of that block contains 41 percent of the fair quality space. By comparison, from 91 percent to 98 percent of the space in the blocks on the north and south sides of 500 Eastern Avenue are in good or excellent condition.



ESSEX COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION
CONDITION OF STRUCTURES

ESSEX, MARYLAND



MAP E. Essex CBD Building Conditions

Parking Facilities

Reconnaissance of the study area determined that there are approximately 870 parking spaces in the CBD. This number follows the study area boundaries rigidly, and therefore it excludes spaces just outside the area. On the other hand, the surveys of shoppers and merchants suggest that shoppers will not come to the CBD if they have to park too far from stores, so the spaces at the edge of the area are not as effective in terms of parking capacity to serve shoppers. Patrons of government services appear to park wherever they can, and there is some complaint from merchants that they crowd shoppers out of close-in parking. A summary of the parking inventory and analysis is presented below (the Technical Appendix documents the findings in detail):

- o Of the total number of spaces, 250 or just less than 30 percent are on-street spaces, and 620 are off-street. Almost 70 percent of the spaces are to the south of Eastern Avenue. Metered spaces -- which constitute 160 or 18 percent of the spaces -- are fairly evenly divided between north and south of Eastern Avenue. Far more free and customer parking is available to the south.
- o Metered spaces are concentrated along Eastern Avenue frontages. Of the total of over 260 metered spaces, 118 are in Revenue Authority lots located to the north in the 500 block, and to the south in the 400 block. Despite this apparent balance, the lots are away from the center of activity at Taylor and Eastern avenues, and they are not heavily used. On-street metered spaces are available on all Eastern Avenue block fronts in the CBD and on some side streets, although not necessarily in even proportions.
- o Free parking, which totals 355 spaces in the CBD, consists of 107 on-street spaces and 248 off-street spaces. About 40 free spaces are on-street spaces near Eastern Avenue frontages (although most of these are on the side streets). The Chertkof lot behind the large retail structure in the 500 block is available to the public and has 132 spaces. Another 68 on-street spaces

and 116 off-street spaces are available south of Maryland Avenue in the 500 block; most are in another Chertkof lot open to the public. These spaces are quite far from many, if not most, of the stores in the downtown.

- o Private restricted parking for customers and employees is available in small amounts in all blocks. Employee parking as identified here (103 spaces) is concentrated in back alleys and behind stores; as such it is cramped and not very accessible. The 151 spaces of customer parking includes 52 spaces at the (new) Post Office; the rest is widely scattered. Apparently, the post office lot is heavily used by other government patrons, as are the Chertkof lots nearby.
- o Practical parking requirements in the CBD determine that from 1,000 to 1,300 spaces are needed to handle current parking needs. Historical counts of 800 to 900 spaces suggest that the existing parking space inventory within the study area consistently has met 70 percent to 80 percent of actual need. This compares to a supply of only 35 to 40 percent of the theoretical need for from 2,200 to 2,500 spaces, based on zoning requirements for parking according to land use. As the CBD is upgraded with more and better retailers, parking need may begin to approach this higher requirement.

Parking Management

Although there is a lack of parking overall in the Essex CBD, metered lots at 409 and 508 Eastern Avenue are underutilized. The lot at 409 Eastern Avenue is rarely more than 25 percent full during business hours, and the lot at 508 is rarely more than 50 percent full, even though the Eastern Avenue Health Center leases approximately one-quarter of the spaces in the lot. Although these off-street lots are not fully utilized, the on-street metered spaces are generally full. There are several reasons for this parking pattern. First, business district patrons generally try to park directly in front of their destinations. Therefore they avoid off-street lots. Second, in public meetings with EDCO, it has been reported that many employees feed the meters in front of their places of employment.

Third, the pricing of the meters is the same (\$.10 per hour) for both on-street two-hour and off-street five- and 10-hour lots. These three factors suggest alternatives that could be pursued to help encourage more utilization of the long-term lots. These parking management alternatives are presented below.

- o Alternative 1 - Pricing at Meters. One alternative would be to increase the price of on-street meters to \$.20 per hour while continuing the cost of off-street metered lots at \$.10 per hour. Twenty cents per hour is still relatively inexpensive for parking in downtown areas, yet this price increase would encourage employees to use long-term lots rather than feed the meters.
- o Alternative 2 - Timing of Meters. The second alternative would be to decrease the on-street meters to one-hour maximum, rather than the present two-hour maximum. If employees have to feed the meters every hour, they may choose to utilize the all-day lots.
- o Alternative 3 - Removal of Meters. A third alternative would be to remove the meters from the long-term lot at 409 Eastern Avenue as the lot is rarely used now. The Revenue Authority would not realize any significant loss of income and on-street spaces would be more available to area businesses.
- o Alternative 4 - Combination of Measures. This alternative would combine selective rate changes, timing, and/or removal of meters.

The alternative recommended for Essex is the fourth alternative, which would raise the price of on-street meters to \$.20 per hour and would remove the meters at the Revenue Authority lot at 409 Eastern Avenue. This increase in price for on-street meters will not significantly affect the desirability of the shopping area, yet, it will encourage greater utilization of long-term lots. It should be noted, however, that whatever parking management strategy is chosen for Essex, EDCO should take a lead

role in educating business owners to encourage employees not to take up valuable on-street parking spaces.

Essex CBD Alleys

The alleys between Eastern Avenue and Dorsey Avenue in the 400 and 500 blocks could provide access to additional off-street parking behind the commercial properties on Eastern Avenue. However, the deteriorated condition of the alleys prohibits many employees from using the potential spaces behind businesses. In earlier revitalization studies of the Essex CBD, improvements to the alleys were recommended. Although some resurfacing of alleys was recently accomplished, the improvements made were of a minimal nature and have not greatly affected the desirability of the parking areas behind properties on the northern side of Eastern Avenue. In order to provide additional employee parking opportunities, major improvements to the alleys should be pursued.

It is also important to note that the Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management has targeted these alleys for improvement due to runoff pollution exacerbated by the poor condition of the alleys. As the stormwater management system outfall is in an Intensely Developed Critical Area, improvements to the alleys will help the County meet the County's Critical Areas goals to reduce pollution from Intensely Developed Areas.